



**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY  
OF  
THE VENERABLE - LEDI SAYADAW**

( Aggamahapandita, D. Litt. )  
( 1846 - 1923 )

by  
Venerable Ashin Nyanissara  
( SITAGU SAYADAW )

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The Venerable Ledi Sayadaw's

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(SITAGU SAYADAW)

THE VENERABLE LEDI SAYADAW

(1846 – 1923)

- \* The most eminent and highly respected teacher of Tipiṭaka,
- \* The most gifted and summit scholar,
- \* The bravest and boldest author,
- \* The great pioneer of meditation master,
- \* The most excellent preacher of the Dhamma,
- \* The most admired and the brightest eye of the West.

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## An Appreciation

There are no words appropriate or adequate to express my feelings of deep gratitude towards my great-grand-Dhamma teacher, the most reverend late Ledi Sayadawgyi. He was the most brilliant star in the galaxy of Dhamma teachers of this age, both in the fields of Pariyatti as well as Patipatti.

The present book on his life is written by Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja Venerable U Nyanissara of Sagaing Sitagu monastery. He is one of the leading personalities in the present day Myanmar Saṅgha. It is all the more a pleasure to learn that this book was written while Venerable Sayadaw visited Dhammagiri, Igatpuri (India) to practise the Vipassana technique as taught by Ledi Sayadaw.

May the readers of this book get inspired to walk on the path of liberation and attain real peace.

Metta Cettana  
(U S.N. Goenka)

## A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF THE VENERABLE LEDI SAYADAW

(Aggamahapandita, D. Litt.)

Known to scholars around the world, the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw was born on Tuesday, the 13<sup>th</sup> Waxing of Nattaw, 1208 Burmese Era (1846 C.E.) at Saing-Pyin Kyee Village, Dipeyin Township, Shwebo District, Sagaing Division of Myanmar (Burma).

### CHILDHOOD

Ledi Sayadaw's parents were U Tun Tha and Daw Kyone. Their first child, a son, died when he was very young. A brilliant rainbow foretold the future of their second child on the day of his birth. This rainbow arose from a tamarind tree on his family's estate. Rising up to the firmament, it then descended into the house of his birth. Then, it ascended through the roof of the house into the sky with a brilliant radiance. Due to this auspicious event the child's parents and relatives awarded him the title of Tat Khaung. In Burmese, *tat* means to climb, rise, ascend, and *khaung* means the top, summit, culmination; so Tat Khaung means one who will climb to the top, who will become the summit or foremost in every field of Buddhism. As a child, he was therefore known as Maung (young boy, master) Tat Khaung, later to become Ledi Sayadaw (Leti Sayadaw), the most outstanding Buddhist figure of this age.

Maung Tat Khaung's first younger brother, Maung Tat Swā, passed his life as a pious layman; his second younger brother, Maung Tat Pwar, became a very eminent scholar-monk name Ledi U Kumāra, or Pathama Pyan U Kumāra (meaning the first and foremost among those taking the recitation examinations); his third younger brother, Maung Tat Twar, also became a learned and principled monk named Ledi U Kitti. As

founder of Ledi Nikāya (the Leti Organization), Maung Tat Khaung became known as U Nyānadhaja (the most excellent and greatest sage, the great benefactor of scholars worldwide, the distinguished lighter of the lamp of meditation for the modern world, the extraordinary discoverer of the renaissance age of meditation) = the Ledi Sayadaw (Leti Sayadaw), Aggamahapandita, D. Litt.

## EXPLANATION OF TERMS

### (1) **Ledi = Leti.**

The actual term is Leti but it pronounced Ledi in Burmese. Ledi, the name by which the Sayadaw, his monastery and his region is best known outside of Myanmar, will be used throughout this book.

Before Ledi Sayadaw's time, a short distance to the northeast of the city of Monywa in Upper Burma, the land was completely covered with a jungle of dense underbrush and tangled vegetation where many wild animals and birds lived. Farmers cleared parts of this jungle, and farms were created on this once wild land on the outskirts of the city. In Burmese *Le* = farms, *ti* = invention, and *taw* = forest. Therefore, this area became known as the farms-invention forest, known in Burmese as *Letitaw*. Later, the Burmese people pronounced it *Ledi Tawya* (*ya* = place).

### (2) **Sayadaw = Sayataw = Saya + Taw**

Saya = teacher;

Taw = great, respectable

Sayadaw (Sayataw) stayed in the midst of this jungle, practised meditation and established meditation and education monasteries. Taking the name of this place, Sayadaw and his monasteries became known as "Ledi Sayadaw and Ledi Monastery."



### (3) Dipeyin

(name of the township where he was born.) Ledi Sayadaw in the conclusions of the *Paramattha Dīpanī* and the *Nirutti Dīpanī* wrote of his birthplace:

*Nagare Diparangamhi,*

*Gāme “saing-pyin” ti nāmake;*

*Atthasuññadwayekamhi,*

*Sāke jātena yā ma yā.*

In the township of Diparanga,

At the village named Saing Pyin:

In 1208 B.E. (Burmese Era)

I was born.

*Tattha nagare diparangamhi-ti =*

*Dipavāsi mahajanam ranjetiti =*

*Diparanganti ladha nāme nagare.*

*Dipa* = Globe.

*Ranga* = Attraction.

This town has attraction for people from all over the globe.

Therein, what does “*nagare diparangamhi*” mean? It means the town which will become renowned to people from all over the globe.

### (4) Saing Pyin Kyee

In the following commentary, Ledi Sayadaw describes the village where he was born.

*Gāme Saing-pyin-ti nāmake*

*Rohita migānam nivāsabhūmitale*

*Patithitāttā evam nāmake mahā gāme.*

It states that long, long ago, in the areas surrounding his native village, there were many kinds of wild animals: bison, deer, barking deer, antelope, reindeer, hyena, wildebeest, goat, etc. Primarily, bison (Rohita Miga) dwelled all around the village.

Saing = Bison

Pyin = Many-Scattering

Gama = Village

Therefore, it was called the Saing Pyin Village.

### EARLY MONKHOOD (1218 – 1228 B.E.)

At 10 years of age, Maung Tat Khaung was sent by his parents to the monastery of Sayadaw U Nanda, who lived in Kyaung Ma Taik, the principle monastery of Saing Pyin Kyi Village. Maung Tat Kaung learned the Burmese language and began the study of the foundations of the Pāli language. He learned by heart the *Lokaniti*, the *Dhammaniti*, 11 *paritta suttaras*, etc. At the age of 15, he was ordained as *samānera* (novice) under the guidance of his preceptor, Sayadaw U Nanda, at Kyaung Ma Talk, in Saing Pyin Kyi Village and thus fulfilling the expectations of his parents. Sayadaw U Nanda gave him the name *Nyānadhaja*, which means possessor of the wisdom-banner.

By age 18, he had mastered the Vedas under Sayadaw U Gandhamā, a Veda expert, in Ye Thwet Village near Saing Pyin Kyi. Meanwhile, Shin Nyānadhaja wrote many poems in Burmese and Pāli, verses concerned with ordination, Jātaka stories, and a Pāli-Burmese grammar.

When he turned 20 years of age, in 1228 B.E. (April 20, 1866), Shin Nyanadhaja was ordained as *Upasampada* (taking higher ordination) under the instruction of his preceptor, Sayadaw U Nanda, in the Sima (ordination hall) named *Sāsana Vuddhi Sāsana Vepulla Sāsana Sobhini* of Myin Tin Monastery, Saing Pyin Kyi Village, Dipeyin Township. As a student, U Nyānadhaja had read all of the books housed in the collections of five monasteries of two Saing Pyin villages (Saing Pyin Kyee and Saing Pyin Kalay = Greater Saing Pyin and Lesser Saing Pyin).

In 1229 B.E. U Nyānadhaja went to Mangalā Sankyaung Taik in the northern part of the city of Mandalay.

## HISTORY OF SANKYAUNG TAIK

When King Mindon established his new capital and palace in Mandalay, he moved his former palace, San Nan Taw, from the old capital of Amarapūra to the new capital of Mandalay. Here he had it reconstructed and donated as a monastery for the benefit of the *Sāsana* donated to Sayadaw titled “*Sudassanavara mahadhamma sāmi rajadhirāja guru*” and “*Sudassanadhaja Atuladhipati siripavara mahadhamma rājādhirāja guru*”. It was named sankyaung Taik (*Maha Jotikārāma* in Pāli).

King Mindon established over 400 monasteries surrounding his new capital in Mandalay with over 2,000 monks living in each monastery. This was a period of great patronage of and participation in Buddhist study and practice, truly a Golden Age for Buddhism. When U Nyānadhaja learned the Pāli Piṭakas in Sankyaung Taik, there numbered over 80,000 monks in Mandalay. According to the regulations of Sankyaung Taik (a kyaung taik is a scholastic center), every student-monk (*bhikkhu*) must learn the *Pātimokkha* (227 rules of conduct) by heart and recite them every evening at the time of homage to the Buddha. U Nyānadhaja would take his place behind all the student monks and recite with them the 227 rules in a loud voice that was sweet and clear. He thus became a leader in chanting ceremonies. U Nyānadhaja stayed at Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay for 10 years. During this period he learned all of the Piṭakas including the *Atthakathā* and *Tikās* (Commentaries and Sub-commentaries) completely and expertly.

## THE FIFTH GREAT SAṄGHA COUNCIL (1233 B.E.)

(*PANCAMA SANGĀYANA*)

According to the Burmese Era, in the year of 1233 B.E. (1871 C.E.), on the full moon day of May, the Fifth Great Saṅgha Council (*Pancama Sangāyana*), supported by King Mindon, was held in the Royal Palace of Mandalay. This great Council was headed by *Baddanta Jāgara* (Phayargyi Sayadaw), *Baddanta Narinda* (Sibani Sayadaw) and *Baddanta Sumangala* (Myinwon Sayadaw). Over 600 selected monks participated.

In the Fifth Saṅgha Council, monks recited the entire *Tipitika*. From Thit Saint Kyaung Taik the monks participated by reciting the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, monks from Salin Kyaung Taik participated by reciting the *Sutta Piṭaka*, and monks from Sankyaung Taik participated by reciting the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. In this great Saṅgha reciting assembly, held in the Golden Royal Palace, U Nyānadhaja recited orally, without any aides, the *Kathā vatthu Abhidhamma*, the fifth book of the seven which comprise the *Abhidhamma*. He was cheered and greatly honored by the Kings, Saṅgha and laymen. Based on this assembly of oral recitation, the great, pious, and righteous King (Mahadhammarājā) had the entire Tipiṭaka inscribed onto 729 slabs of marble and housed in the Kuthodaw Pagoda below Mandalay Hill. Collected into one big heap like a book, the collection would surely be the largest book in the world!

#### BECOMING LEDI SAYADAW (1229 – 1244 B.E.)

During his stay at Sankyaung Taik, U Nyānadhaja continued to study and learn the Tipiṭaka texts, commentaries and sub-commentaries under the guidance and teaching of Sankyaung Sayadaw, Makutārāma Sayadaw, Salin Sayadaw and other eminent scholar-monks in Mandalay. He also gave lectures on the Tipiṭaka to the 2,000 student monks at Sankyaung Taik. He was considered most skillful in teaching the *Abhidhamma* and Pāli grammar. After the Sangāyana (the fifth Saṅgha Council), in the tenth year of his monkhood (1239 B.E., 1877 C.E.), his great skill at lecturing was recognized by the King, who awarded him the title of *Pathama Sācha* (First Great Lecturer).

When he had been 14 years in the monkhood, U Nyānadhaja was teaching Tipiṭaka students at Sankyaung Taik. When Sankyaung Sayadaw set out 20 questions in Pāli about *Pāramis* (perfections) of *Buddha*, *Pacceka Buddha* (Independently Enlightened One) and *Sāvakās* (Noble Disciples). Among the 2,000 student monks, no one could answer these questions satisfactorily except U Nyānadhaja. So excellent were his answers that they were collected and arranged to be published in his first book, called *Pārami Dīpanī* (The Manual of Perfection).

On every sabbath day (*Uposatha*) U Nyānadhaja used to visit the Duke of the Yo region, Minister U Hlaing. U Hlaing was a gifted and learned person in many fields with a keen intellect, and he had written many books. U Nyānadhaja spent long hours with him in discussions of both mundane (*Lokiya*) and supramundane (*Lokuttarā*) aspects of reality. From these discussions he mastered the comparative study of discourses, verses, proverbs, poems, etc.

Later, Shwe Yay Saung Sayadaw instructed Man Aung Sayadaw to translate the *Nigamagāthā* (conclusion stanzas) of Manisāra Manjusatikā from Pāli into the Burmese language. Man Aung Sayadaw turned this task over to Sankyaung Sayadaw, who assigned the task to U Nyānadhaja. The stanzas were very deep and very complicated to understand properly. U Nyānadhaja was able to render an excellent translation, which highly satisfied the Sayadaws.

During this period, Burmese students and teachers of *Abhidhamma* relied heavily on a Sinhalese commentary, the *Abhidhammattha Vibhavani Tikā*, written by the Venerable Summangalasāmi of ancient Ceylon (Sri Lanka). U Nyānadhaja heard a discussion among Sinhalese (Sri Lankan) scholar-monks who were visiting Mandalay at the time. They said, “Burmese monks do not understand *Abhidhamma* and Pāli grammar correctly because they are studying and teaching the *Abhidhammattha Vibhavani Tikā* in which there are many mistakes in both theory and grammar. Have they not discovered and realized these mistakes?” So U Nyānadhaja firmly resolved to someday write a new *Abhidhamma Tikā* and new Pāli grammar texts.

U Nyānadhaja had arrived in Sankyaung Taik (*Mahajotikārāma*) in Mandalay in 1229 B.E. Ten years later, in 1239 B.E., he was honored as first Great Lecturer (*Pathama Sācha*). One year later, King Mindon passed away. In 1240 B.E., Thibaw, the son of Mindon, became King. Then, in 1244 B.E., in the fourth year of the reign of King Thibaw, the whole capital of Mandalay was ravaged by fire, including many parts of the palace and Sankyaung Taik. U Nyānadhaja lost many books, notes, references, quotations, etc., in the fire. He had spent 16 years in Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay: 9 years as a student and 7 years as a teacher. As long as he dwelled there, he buried his life in the service

of the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*. He always cleaned the whole monastery and compound. He washed all the toilets in the morning and daily fetched drinking water, bathing water and toilet water for all the monks during those 16 years. In 1244 B.E. after the great fire, U Nyānadhaja paid homage to Sankyaung Sayadaw and left the gutted palace and monastery in the capital. He went to Monywa. Three years later, in 1247 B.E., the British occupation forces arrested King Thibaw and sent him into exile at Ratanagiri, near Bombay, India.

### RETREAT TO LEDI FOREST (1248 B.E.)

In Monywa (Town) U Nyānadhaja stayed at Shwesekhon Kyaung near Shwesekhon Pagoda for a short period of time and then returned to Saing Pyin Kyi Village where he was born. In 1245 B.E., he spent his rainy retreat (Buddhist Lent or *vassa*) at a bamboo vihāra near Marajina Pagoda, near Monywa. During the rainy retreats of 1246 – 48 B.E., U Nyānadhaja stayed at U Wine Monastery, donated by Thangyo U Wine, a merchant from Monywa. At the end of the rainy retreat in 1248 B.E. (1887 C.E.), Sayadaw withdrew into Ledi jungle (mentioned above). Sayadaw's disciples searched for him for many days. Finally, they found him sitting alone under a huge tamarind tree with only three robes and one black bowl in the middle of a thick jungle, called Ledi, to the northeast of Monywa. This marks the beginning of the era of Ledi Sayadaw and of his monastery called Ledi Kyaung Taik.

Around this time Sayadaw started preaching not to eat oxen and cattle. He preached that oxen correspond to fathers, who plow the land and give food to the whole family. Cows resemble mothers, who feed milk to children. Human beings should not eat the meat of oxen and cows, so similar are they to parents. Sayadaw wrote many open letters at that time urging people to abstain from eating beef (“The Letter of Fervent Love for Cattle”, or *Gomettasa* [in Burmese], an admonitory letter for the abstention from eating beef).

In those days, in the Ledi jungle, various ogres, ghosts, giants, spirits, etc., were threatening and frightening the people who came there. These creatures were frightening even to the Sayadaw as he meditated alone in the forest. In response, he developed deep *Metta*

*Bhavana* (loving-kindness meditation) toward them. This bound the creatures to him with a spirit of love and kindness. They immediately became the Sayadaw's friends and attendants and never frightened the people again. Because of this, Sayadaw's fame and high esteem spread among the people, and he became known as "Ledi Sayadaw". Soon after, three young monks who had been Sayadaw's students, came to him in his forest viihāra in order to attend him, care for all his needs and learn the Tipiṭaka from him. As the students and monks attending him gradually increased, Sayadaw's devoted and pious laypeople extended the accommodations at his monastery. When learned monks from many places began coming to Ledi Sayadaw to study scriptures and meditation, the pious laypeople built many residential monasteries, dining halls, teaching halls, preaching halls, shrine halls, meditation halls, secluded huts, stupas, Buddha images, water wells, water tanks, etc. Sayadaw consecrated ground to build an ordination hall. He designated the Ledi Monastery as *Sādhujanapāsādikārāma* (meaning "the monastery for the gladdening of good people") and named the ordination hall *Sāsana Sobhini Simā* (meaning the consecration for the courtesy of dispensation). These names were insignificant in the legend of Ledi Sayadaw. The monastery and the Sayadaw became renown throughout the world as Ledi, the name taken from the forest near his birthplace.

Sayadaw U Nyānadhaja established Ledi Monastery and Ledi Organization at the age of 40, in 1248 B.E. (1886 C.E.). From the establishment of Ledi Monastery until 1257 B.E., for 12 years, he taught the Tipiṭaka to student-monks who came from various places. Every day, Sayadaw swept the shrine halls, terraces, open spaces and stairways of Sutaung Pyae and Shwesikhon Pagodas in Monywa. He swept the whole campus of the monastery, cleaned all the toilets, filled all the water pots with fresh water, attended and nursed sick monks and gave his holy services to all monks.

Amongst his many activities and obligations, Ledi Sayadaw was also able to accomplish a task he had set for himself many years before at Sankyaung Taik in Mandalay. Remembering the Sinhalese commentary on the *Abhidhamma*, the *Abhidhammattha Vibhāvani Tikā*, Ledi Sayadaw discovered and corrected over 230 errors in it. From his studies and lectures, he compiled a new commentary on the *Abhidhamma* in 1259 B.E., entitled the *Paramattha-Dīpanī Tikā*.

In spite of his renown, over 20 different monks criticized and denigrated this work and wrote 20 *Tikās* of their own to contradict the *Paramattha-Dīpanī Tikā*. However, most of those deprecating commentaries are hardly remembered among scholars and students today. Only two became even slightly famous in Burma. These were the *Paramattha Visodhani Tika* by Khyaung Oo Sayadaw U Dipa and the *Ankura Tikā* by Talinelone Sayadaw U Vimala. The *Paramattha-Dīpanī Tikā*, on the other hand, has become a standard reference on the *Abhidhamma* among teachers, students and scholars around the world.

(Meanwhile, Ledi Sayadaw translated his Pāli *Tikā* into Burmese.) He wrote the following works at Ledi Monastery in 1256 B.E. *Lakkhana Dīpanī* (Manual of Characteristics); *Punnovāda Kammathan* (the meditation taught for *punna*); and *Uposatha Sāla Vincchaya* (a decisive talk on sabbath virtue).

In 1257 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw travelled to Bodhagaya, India, the holiest of Buddhist places, and from there he visited other Buddhist holy places including Sarnath, Rajagaha, Sāvatti, Lumbini, etc. As he travelled, first by train to Rangoon, then by ship to Calcutta, and while he visited these holy places in India, Ledi Sayadaw wrote 13 verses *Paticcasamuppāda* (13 verses of Dependent Origination). On arrival back in Rangoon, Sayadaw compiled a book entitled *Paticcasamuppāda Dīpanī* (A Manual of Dependent Origination). The publication of many works in the following years occurred in this way as Ledi Sayadaw travelled continuously up and down Burma, spending his rainy retreats writing manuals in answer to the questions of his many disciples and lay-followers and meditating continuously.

In 1258 B.E., when he was fifty years old, Sayadaw entered the Sapagan Tawtankyi Forest, Twante Township, Hansāvati District, and stayed at Sapagan Forest Monastery. Here he retreated to practice *kasina* meditation and attained the fourth *jhāna*. Then, Sayadaw began *Ānāpāna* meditation. He consequently wrote “The Lion’s Roar”, a poem which he gave to his senior disciple and well-known *dharmapreacher*, Ledi Vannita. In this poem Ledi Sayadaw mentioned that he had attained the fourth *jhāna* and that he would surely be reborn in the Brahma world.



During 1259 and 1260 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw spent his rainy retreats at Ledi Monastery, wrote the *Lakkhana Dīpanī* (Manual of Characteristics) the *Punnovāda Dīpanī*, and the *Vijjāmaggā Dīpanī*. At the end of his rainy retreat in 1260 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw went to Thit Khya Taung Tawya (Oak Tree Mountain Forest Monastery) in Kyaik Hto Township, in Mon State (Burma), at the invitation of U Tiloka, a forest-dwelling monk, who was one of his senior disciples and author of *pandita vedaniya Dīpanī*, which was Ledi Sayadaw's favorite book.

## MARVELLOUS EVENTS

In the Oak Mountain Forest Monastery, Ledi Sayadaw taught meditation privately to his disciples: U Tiloka, U Nandamālā, U Visuddha, U Javana, U Sobhana and U Sandara. He meditated diligently along with them day and night. One evening, Kappiya (his attendant) Maung Sa Mon went to Ledi Sayadaw's meditation cottage to bring him a drink, stood at the door and saw Ledi Sayadaw sitting in the air three feet off the ground. Maung Sa Mon stared in amazement at his Sayadaw and told the other monks about this wonderful event. U Tiloka, U Nandamālā, U Visuddha, U Javana, U Sobhana and U Sundara, who were all senior disciples, came to witness this marvelous event. They paid their respects to their great teacher for his excellent qualities and agreed not to tell anyone about what they had seen.

From Oak Tree Mountain Monastery, Sayadaw visited Kusinaron Pagoda of Bi Lin Township. There he met many hermits who wanted him to teach them about magical science (*Vijjā*) and those who possess magical power (*vijjādhara*). Ledi Sayadaw explained to them about real *vijjā* (wisdom) and real *vijjādhara* (possessors of wisdom). The hermits implored Ledi Sayadaw to write a book about *vijjā*. This book, called *Vijjāmagga Dīpanī*, was completed in Thit Khya Taung Tawya, Kyaik Hto Township. When Sayadaw went to visit Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda, which was in a mountain forest, a herd of wild elephants came running toward Sayadaw and his followers. The group of disciples ran away and scampered up trees to get out of the way, but Sayadaw stood firm, sending *mettā*. As he did this, the wild elephants slowed their stampede and approached Sayadaw in a gentle manner, paid their respects to him and

quietly departed. This incident was reminiscence of when the Buddha with his *mettā* tamed the rampaging elephant which Devadatta had sent to kill him. This further increased Ledi Sayadaw's renown.

In 1261 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw spent his rainy retreat at Dhammānanda Monastery, in Le Sin Village, Monywa Township. During his stay there he wrote the *Nibbāna Dīpanī*. This was used as a reference in the famous work written later by the great scholar, Mahavisuddharama Sayadaw. His work, which referred to the *Nibbāna Dīpanī*, is the great Abhidhamma book, *Paramatthasanipabhedani*. Sayadaw Mahavisuddharama urged Ledi Sayadaw to write about his personal method of teaching and learning the Tipiṭaka. Ledi Sayadaw completed this work in 1261 B.E., naming it *Mahasayana Dīpanī*.

In 1262 B.E., Sayadaw authored the *Uttamapurisa Dīpanī*. He then took his rainy season retreat at Maha Myaing forest north of Dipeyin Township, where he joined his disciple, U Eindaka, the Kyaung Pan Sayadaw, who had dwelled there for nine years. Teacher and disciple lived together, and Ledi Sayadaw taught U Eindaka his meditation method. They practiced diligently and continuously without sleep, day and night. The cold weather, dense jungle environment and wild animals, snakes, birds and insects provided little comfort to the Sayadaws. After some time U Eindaka fell ill and Ledi Sayadaw went begging for alms and offered the food he received to his sick disciple. At the end of Lent, Ledi Sayadaw also fell ill and returned to Ledi Forest, where he passed the time reading, writing, teaching, preaching, and meditation day to night and night to day. He sent two of his disciples, Ledi Pandi and Ledi Kittī to Mahavissuddhāyāma Sayadaw in Mandalay to learn the Tipiṭaka.

During the years 1263-64 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw moved to Shwe Taung U Mountain on the bank of the Ctainwin (Sallāvātī) River near Alon Town, and resided in a stone cave. At that time he wrote three books: (1) the *Āhāra Dīpanī*, (2) the *Annata Dīpanī*, and (3) the *Dhamma Dīpanī*. Sayadaw grew seriously ill during his stay at the mountain monastery. One day, a very old and peculiar white person appeared to pay his respects to Sayadaw and gave him some strange medicine for his illness, which Sayadaw took. His illness immediately disappeared. This strange white person was believed by many people as a Celestial being.

In 1265 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw moved to Latpantaung Mountain, on the north bank of the Chindwin River, three miles to the west of Monywa. Here, Sayadaw meditated with strong determination and also wrote the following five books:

- (1) *Sammāditthi Dīpanī* (Manual of Right Understanding)
- (2) *Catusacca Dīpanī* (Manual of the Four Noble Truths)
- (3) *Kammatthāna Dīpanī* (Manual of Meditation)
- (4) *Paramattha Sankhepa* (stanzas in Burmese)
- (5) *Nirutti Dīpanī* (in Pāli)

The *Nirutti Dīpanī* was a commentary on the *Mogallānavyākaraṇa*, a famous classical Pāli grammar. Sayadaw inserted the essence of other ancient Pāli grammars into the *Nirutti Dīpanī*, commenting on the *Kaccāyana*, the *Ruppasidhi* and the *Sadda Niti*, and presenting many examples from the Tipiṭaka. Ledi Sayadaw was highly esteemed and honored for his writings in Pāli (his commentaries on the *Abhidhammā* and his Pāli grammar) by the world's scholars.

## STRIKING THE DHAMMA DRUM

Near the end of 1265 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw wrote a long verse called “Profound Poem” and had it sent to Kinwonminkyi U Kaung, the former prime minister of King Mindon and subsequently King Thibaw. U Kaung was very impressed upon reading this poem, and he invited Sayadaw to come to Mandalay and stay at his residence in the old palace compound. Both Kings had been avid students and supporters of the Dhamma. Since the British annexation of Burma and the exile of the monarchy, there had been a “teaching vacuum felt among the remaining echelons of court society. Ledi Sayadaw was destined to fill that vacuum by delivering Dhamma lectures at night and in the daytime by answering the many questions that arose among the royal family and the educated audiences who heard his discourses. On certain days he taught Ānāpāna meditation to these same audiences and authored a

book on this technique, the *Ānāpāna Dīpanī*, while staying at U Kaung's house in the Old Royal Palace. During his sojourn at the Mandalay Palace, Ledi Sayadaw's Dhamma preaching became widely celebrated throughout the capital city, and his fame spread. This began the striking of the Ledi Dhamma drum throughout the country. When people heard the deep, resonant sound of this kettle drum of Dhamma, they began to invite Ledi Sayadaw to travel all over Burma to teach this excellent Dhamma.

For many years, Sayadaw had been teaching and expounding the complex metaphysical analysis contained in the seven volumes of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, one of the three main divisions, or "baskets", of the Theravada Buddhist Canon. These seven volumes include:

- (1) *Dhammasangani* - Classification of Dhamma
- (2) *Vibhanga* - Analysis of Dhamma
- (3) *Dhātukathā* - Discussion with Reference to Elements
- (4) *Puggalapaññatti* - Designation of Individuals
- (5) *Kathāvatthu* - Points of Controversy
- (6) *Yamaka* - Pairs of Dhamma
- (7) *Paṭṭhāna* - Causal Relation of Dhamma

At this time, in the world of classical Pāli literature, one of the most popular *Abhidhamma* manuals was the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*, known to scholars "An Outline of Buddhist Philosophy". *Abhi* means great, excellent, sublime; *Dhamma* means doctrine, teaching, truth; *Attha* means nature or thing; and *Sangaha* means a collection, compendium or outline. Therefore, the *Abhidhammatthasangaha* is an outline of the nature of the great, sublime teaching, i.e., an outline of Buddhist philosophy. Although this book was widely read among scholars, its language was much too complex to be understood by the ordinary layperson. To rectify the need for a simple manual for laypeople to study the Dhamma, Ledi Sayadaw compiled the *Paramattha Sankhitta*, as a digest or summation of the ultimate truth. This was written in beautiful and expressive poetical stanzas in the Burmese language, making it easy for the average person to recite and understand. Now that the

*Abhidhamma* teachings were in a shorter, more easily understandable form, Ledi Sayadaw could urge the entire nation to take up the study of this deep and sublime aspect of the Dhamma.

To further facilitate the dissemination of the Dhamma to the people, Ledi Sayadaw organized and established “*Paramattha Sankhit* Associations”, or Digest Associations. These associations became so widespread that they brought *Abhidhamma* study to all levels of Burmese society, whereas before it had been the domain of scholars only. Later, a commentary called *Paramattha Sankhitta Tikā* was composed by Ledi Panditawo further aid in the spread of this wonderful teaching. It is this combination of great erudition and deep compassion for the education of the common person that makes Ledi Sayadaw so important to the spread of the Dhamma.

In 1266 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw resided at In Kyin Myaing Tawya, to the north of Pyinmanar Town, and during his rainy retreat, he authored the following books: *Bhāvāna Dīpanī*, *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī* and *Saddasankhepa (Sadda Sankhitta)*.

In 1267 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw spent his next rainy season retreat at Yekangyitawya (Great Lake Forest Monastery) in Myingyan Town. At this place he helped to establish and organize a *Patīccasamuppāda* Association, a *Paramattha Sankhit* Association, a *Vipassanā* Association and the Association for Refraining from Eating Beef, among others. As was his habit, the solitary act of writing books was balanced by Ledi Sayadaw’s social outreach to form public organizations which encouraged the study and practice of many different aspects of the Dhamma.

At times, Ledi Sayadaw travelled continuously throughout the country to teach meditation and Dhamma study to all levels of society. He not only travelled to drought areas, but also to plague-infested areas and to feuding villages. Sayadaw’s visits to these places were known to bring rain to dry places, the cessation of disease to plague areas and peace to feuding villages.

In 1268 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw spent his *vassa* at a *Vipassanā* meditation center near the ancient capital of Prome, the *Vipassanakone Tawya*. He also returned to Mandalay for a visit. Travel, during this period of Burmese history was slow and difficult, thus making the extent of

his travels all the more remarkable. While in Mandalay, he stayed at Masoeyein Kyaung Taik and delivered Dhamma talks on Vipassanā and other meditation techniques in many parts of the city.

In 1270 B.E., Sayadaw spent his *vassa* at Mawla Myaing. During the years of 1270 – 1272 B.E., the plague spread throughout the country, and many people died. A book called *Rogantara Dīpanī* was published by Ledi Sayadaw in which he instructed people how to protect themselves from disease.

In 1276, while Sayadaw stayed at Ratanāsiri Monastery, he wrote the *Vipassanā Dīpanī* (The Manual of Insight Meditation) during the annual meeting of the Society for Propagating Buddhism in Foreign Countries. The *Vipassanā Dīpanī* was dedicated as an “Outline of the Exercises of Insight for the Buddhists of Europe” and was written as a compendium of Buddhist doctrine for those in Europe who wanted to practice Vipassanā meditation.

## THE LEDI LEGACY

Ledi Sayadaw was simultaneously a great teacher to his monks and lay disciples, a great Dhamma preacher to large segments of the Burmese population, a founder and organizer of many Buddhist lay organizations, a famous teacher and popularizer of meditation practice, especially Ānāpāna and Vipassanā, and a classical scholar-monk and author of classical works. To say that his accomplishments were prodigious would be an understatement. He established many well-known monasteries throughout Burma, some of which were located in Monywa, Mandalay, Myinkhyān (Myingyan), Sagaing, Pyinmanar, Taungngu, Yangon, Mawlamyaing, Hinthata, Pathein, Kyaiktho and Thaton. He set up three kinds of monasteries: education centers, meditation centers and secluded forest retreats. Among the many associations which Sayadaw organized throughout Burma on villages, towns and cities were: the *Sankhitta* Associations, *Abhidhamma* Associations, *Vipassanā* Associations, *Paticcasamuppāda* Associations, the Association for Refraining from Eating Beef, the Pāli Translation Society and the World Buddhist Missionary Association, The Pāli Translation Association, headed by his senior disciple, Sayadaw U Nyana, compiled a Pāli English dictionary.

Possibly one of Ledi Sayadaw's most significant legacies can be found in the large number of his disciples and students who themselves made significant contributions to the propagation of the Dhamma. U Nyana, the Masoeyein Sayadaw, was very learned in Pāli language and literature, and in the Tipiṭaka. Sayadaw U Nyana translated some of Ledi Sayadaw's manuals from Pāli into Burmese and English. Ledi Pāṇḍita (M.A., Saya U Maung Kyee) was a master of Pāli, Sanskrit, the Tipiṭaka, Dhamma preaching and an author. Among Ledi Sayadaw's disciples notable for their skills as teachers, preachers and authors in the Ledi Organization (Ledi Nikaya) include Ledi Vannita, Ledi U Kumara, Ledi U Maheinda, Ledi U Eindaka (Kyaung Pan Sayadaw), Ledi U Paduma, Ledi U Pañṇasiha, Ledi U Kitti, Ledi U Vāyama (Aggamahapandita Saya Myo), Ledi U Nandiya (The Phyu Sayadaw), Ledi U Thumana (Aggamahapandita Moehnyin Sayadawgyi) , Yangon U Dhammacari, Thit Khya Taung U Tiloka, Ledi Saya Thetgyi, Ledi U Nandiya (Amarapura), Ledi U Khemeinda (Moe Kot), Ledi U Vayama (Monywa) and Ledi U Kevala (Thapye pintawya).

One of these disciples who was to have a far-reaching influence in the spread of Ledi Sayadaw's meditation techniques was the layman, Saya Thetgyi. Today, in Myanmar, the International Meditation Center (of U Ba Khin), the Hansāwati Meditation Center, the Ledi Mū Meditation Center—all in Yangon, and the Maha Bodi Meditation Center in Mandalay, follow in the tradition of Saya Thetgyi. Saya Thetgyi studied meditation under Ledi Sayadaw and dwelt in the forest for ten years before accepting students who wanted to learn how to meditate from him.

In 1275 B.E., Ledi Sayadaw founded the "World Buddhist Missionary Association" in Mandalay. Subsequently, 24 sub-associations were organized in the larger cities throughout Burma. This association worked closely with the Pāli Text Society of England in answering many questions and translating these answers and many commentaries and Dīpanīs into English for the Pāli Text Society. The World Buddhist Missionary Association (W.B.M.A.) also published a newspaper, the *Ledi Tayār Tha Tinsar*, or the *Ledi Dhamma Newspaper*.

In 1273 B.E. (1912 C.E.), due to his great reputation and tireless effort on behalf of the Burmese people, Ledi Sayadaw became the first

person awarded the title of Aggamahāpandita by the British government since the annexation of Burma as a British colony. Ledi Sayadaw declined the invitation to accept this award and did not attend his award ceremony. However, three of his disciples attended the ceremony and accepted the seal of Aggamahāpandita on his behalf. In 1276 B.E. (1915 C.E.), Mahavisuddharāma Sayadaw was the second Sayadaw to receive this highest honor, followed by Manle Sayadaw, who received the third subsequent award presented in 1277 B.E. (1916 C.E.).

Later, Ledi Sayadaw was awarded the title of Doctor of Literature (D. Litt) by the British Government in 1283 B.E. (1922 C.E.) at the grand opening ceremony of Rangoon University. Again, Ledi Sayadaw declined to accept this distinguished title. The Chancellor of Rangoon University went to Ledi Sankyaung near Zetawan Pagoda in Sagaing Hills and presented the title of D. Litt. to Ledi Sayadaw's disciples.

During the last two years of his life, Ledi Sayadaw dwelled at Ledi Sankyaung in Pyinmanar. When he was 77 years old (in the fifty-seventh year of his monkhood), he expired on the full-moon day of Waso (July), 1285 B.E. (1923 C.E.). The great teacher of the world passed away. The Lamp of Dhamma was extinguished. Ledi Sayadaw, the sun that enlightened the world, was no more.

## SUMMARY OF LENT SERIES (1248 – 1257 B.E.)

Ledi Sayadaw founded Ledi Monastery, Monywa, in 1248 B.E. (1887 C.E.), after 20 years of monkhood. He consequently spent the next nine rainy season retreats at Ledi Monastery. During those nine years Sayadaw taught Tipiṭaka to student-monks who came to him from many places. He preached the Dhamma to laypeople, wrote many books, answered many questions and practiced Vipassana continuously.

After 1257 B.E.

Sayadaw travelled continuously to different parts of Burma as a Dhamma messenger. Sayadaw returned and stayed at Ledi Monastery for Vassa during the years 1259, 1260, 1272 and 1279 B.E.



Following is a list of monasteries where Ledi Sayadaw spent his rainy season retreats (Vassa or Buddhist Lent):

1 Lent, at Saing Pyin Kyee Village (his birth-place), Dipeyin Township.

15 Lents, at Mahajotikarama Sankyaung Mandalay (as student and teacher)

1 Lent, at a small monastery near Lokamārajina, Monywa

3 Lents, U Wine Monastery, Monywa

13 Lents, Ledi Forest Monastery, Monywa

1 Lent, Sapagan Forest, Dala Township

1 Lent, Mahamyaing Forest, Dipeyin Township

1 Lent, LeSin Village, Monywa Township

2 Lents, Shwetaung U Forest, Ah Lon Township

1 Lent, Lapantaung Mountain, Monywa

2 Lents, In Kyin Myaing Forest, Pyinmana

1 Lent, Myingyan Town

2 Lents, Bhavanakon Mountain, Prome (Pyi Myo)

1 Lent, Phat Tan Forest Monastery, Min Hla Town

1 Lent, Kyaiksanlan Pagoda, Mawlamyaing

1 Lent, Thapaung Town (near Pathein)

1 Lent, Nyaungkon Monastery, Rangoon

2 Lents, Leti Sankyaung, Sagaing Hills

3 Lents, Leti Sankyaung, Mandalay

1 Lent, Myit Thai Town

1 Lent, Kyauk Wine Monastery, Rangoon

1 Lent, Ka Tun Monastery

2 Lents, Ledisankyaung, Pyinmanar.

## **So Ledi Sayadaw spent**

17 Lents Learning & Teaching in Mandalay

19 Lents Teaching, Preaching & Writing in Villages and Towns

21 Lents, Teaching, Preaching, Writing & Practicing Vipassana in the Forest

57 Lents, in total

## **The Books Written By Ledi Sayadaw**

Below are some of the commentaries (Tikās), manuals (Dīpanīs), essays, letters, poems, verses and answers to questions written by the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw.

### **In Pāli**

1. *Paramattha Dīpanī Tikā (Manual of Ultimate Truths)*
2. *Paramattha AnuDīpanī*
3. *Nirutti Dīpanī or Vuttimoggallana Tikā*
4. *Vibhatyattha Tikā*
5. *Vaccavāca.ka Tikā*
6. *Pattānudessa Dīpanī (Buddhist Philosophy of Relations)*
7. *Sammāditthi Dīpanī (Manual of Right Views)*
8. *Sāsanasampatti Dīpanī*
9. *S~sanavipatti Dīpanī*
10. *Niyāma Dīpanī (Manual of Cosmic Order)*
11. *Vipassanā Dīpanī (Manual of Insight)*
12. *Yamaka Pucchā Visajjanā*
13. *Anattavibāvani*
14. *Gāravavinicchaya*
15. *Pancanga Dīpanī*

16. *Upasampadaduanada kammavācā*
17. *Parivāsa kammavācā*
18. *London Pāli Devi (Questions and Answers)*
19. *Exposition of Buddhism for the West*
20. *Niyāma Dīpanī Tikā*
21. *Mūlapariyā Sutta Tikā*
22. *Padhāna Sutta Nissaya*

In Burmese

1. *Lakkhana Dīpanī (Manual of Characteristics of Existence)*
2. *Mahāsayana Dīpanī (Manual of Great Lying Down)*
3. *Vijjāmagga Dīpanī (Manual of the Way to the Holy-Path-Knowledge)*
4. *Dalvikamma Dīpanī*
5. *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī (Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment)*
6. *Anatta Dīpanī (Manual of Impersonality)*
7. *Somanassaupekkhā Dīpanī (Manual of Joy and Equanimity)*
8. *Sammāditthi Dīpanī*
9. *Āhāra Dīpanī (Manual of Nutritive Essence)*
10. *Bhayavināsaka Dīpanī*
11. *Āloka Dīpanī*
12. *Kammatthāna Dīpanī (Manual of Meditation— Subjects)*
13. *Anattanisamsa Dīpanī*
14. *Sukumāra Magga Dīpanī*
15. *Gambhira Dīpanī*
16. *Rūpa Dīpanī (Manual of Material Characteristics)*

17. *Saccatha Dīpanī*
18. *Ānāpāna Dīpanī (Manual of Exhaling and Inhaling)*
19. *Bhāvanā Dīpanī (Manual of Mental Concentration)*
20. *Magganga Dīpanī (Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path)*
21. *Nibbāna Dīpanī (Manual of Nibbāna)*
22. *Uttama Purisa Dīpanī (Manual of the Real Superman)*
23. *Dāna Dīpanī*
24. *Paticcasamuppāda Dīpanī (Manual of Dependent Origination)*
25. *Pārami Dīpanī (Manual of Perfections)*
26. *Niyāma Dīpanī*
27. *Catusacca Dīpanī (Manual of the Four Noble Truths)*
28. *Vipassanā Dīpanī*
29. *Sāsanasampatti Dīpanī*
30. *Sāsanavipatti Dīpanī*
31. *Sāsanadāyajja Dīpanī*
32. *Gonasurā Dīpanī*
33. *Rogantara Dīpanī*
34. *Dhātu Kammatthana Dīpanī*
35. *Sāsanavisodani*
36. *Dhamma Dīpanī*
37. *Paramnattha Dīpanī Nissaya*
38. *Nirutti Dīpanī Nissaya*
39. *Āvenkaguna Vinicchaya*
40. *AnuDīpanī Nissaya*

41. *Asankhāra-Sasankhāra Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
42. *Sikkhā-gahana Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
43. *Cetiyangana Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
44. *Upasampada Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
45. *Nibbāna Vinicchaya (Vissajjanā) Dīpanī*
46. *Sotapanna Vinicchaya (Vissajjanā) Dīpanī*
47. *Punnovada Kammatthāna Dīpanī*
48. *Mangala Sutta Dīpanī*
49. *Inaparibhoga Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
50. *Virati-sila Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
51. *Dighāsan Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
52. *Sarana-gamana Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
53. *Annattavibhavanā*
54. *Maha Sarana Gamana*
55. *Atthavisa Buddha Cakkaparitta*
56. *Khandā Āyatana Dhātu Saccā Āloka*
57. *Paramattha Sankhitta*
58. *Vinya Sankhitta*
59. *Sadda Sankhitta*
60. *Anatta Dīpanī (second)*
61. *“Alphabets” Sankhitta*
62. *Prosody Sankhitta*
63. *Alankā Sakhitta*
64. *Spelling Sankhitta*
65. *Rūpa Pariccheda Sankhitta*

66. *Vassavāsika Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
67. *Samphapalapa Vinicchaya Dīpanī*
68. *Gambhira-kabyā-kyan (Manual of Profound Verses)*
69. *Open Letter for Abstention from Taking Beef*
70. *Epic on Alarm (Samvegakabyā)*
71. *Ajivatthamakasila Vinicchaya*
72. *Answers for Questions on Christianity*
73. *Answers for Questions of Pāli Devi*
74. *Answers for Questions on Hinduism*
75. *Answers for Questions on Heaven*
76. *Answers for Questions on Nibbāna*
77. *Answers for Questions on the Idea of the Soul*
78. *Answers for Questions of the London Pāli (Devi)*

#### In English

1. *The Vipassanā Dīpanī (the Manual of Insight)*
2. *The Patthānuddesa Dīpanī (The Buddhist Philosophy of Relations)*
3. *Sammāditthi Dīpanī (The Manual of Right Views)*
4. *Niyāma Dīpanī (The Manual of Cosmic Order)*
5. *The Catusacca Dīpanī (The Manual of the Four Noble Truths)*
6. *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī (The Manual of the Factors Leading to Enlightenment)*
7. *Maganga Dīpanī (The Manual of the Constituents of the Noble Path)*
8. *Alin-Kyan (An Exposition of Five Kinds of light)*

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4. Biography of Ledi Classic Persons by Ledi Mahinda (U Hla Paing)
5. Parammattha Sankhitta Tika (Commentary on the Summary of Realities) by Ledi Pandita (U Maung Kyee)
6. Biography of Arahants and Extraordinary Persons by Dhammacariya U Htay Hlaing.
7. All of the Manuals written by Ledi Sayadaw.

May the Dhamma prevail in every corner of the world.

May all beings be happy and peaceful forever.

May all beings know the Dhamma properly.

May all beings be liberated from their misery.

With *Mettā*,

Venerable Sitagu Sayadaw

Thegon Ashin Nyānissara